

## Rep. Baird Outlines Policy on Iraq (February 19, 2003)

If indeed Iraq is reaching a moment of truth, so too is our own nation and every American must fully understand what we know and what we do not know about the consequences of the choices before us.

Under the Constitution of the United States, the Congress bears the authority to declare war. Nevertheless, over the dissent of nearly one third of its members, including myself, Congress voted to cede that responsibility to the President. The President has now made speeches that suggest war is inevitable and it appears he has no intention of returning to Congress for further authorization.

### Unanswered Questions

Secretary Powell's speech before the U.N. was compelling, but war is not inevitable and it is not necessarily the best course of action to secure our safety and protect our nation. There are other options and the question before our nation and before the world is, what is the best course of action as the situation now stands?

I believe the answer to that question is not as clear or simple as some may wish to think. I share that belief with, among others, military leaders such as Wesley K. Clark and with conservative Republican members of Congress, such as Ron Paul of Texas. This is not about doves versus hawks or liberals versus conservatives. It is about the best choice in a very difficult situation fraught with risks and uncertainty regardless of which path is chosen.

As the President stands poised to launch this nation on an irreversible course, neither he nor Secretaries Powell or Rumsfeld have clearly made public or presented to the Congress any estimates of the levels of American or Iraqi casualties. Neither have they described in any detail what the long term plans would be for Iraq, assuming the war proceeds as swiftly and efficiently as they suggest it will. Nor have they budgeted for the costs of the war or a subsequent occupation in any of their budget figures.

The only thing we do know about war is that once it starts, anything can happen and the long term commitment of American troops and dollars will be enormous. General Clark refers to these concerns as the unpredictability of consequences, while General Schwartzkopf has asked, What is postwar Iraq going to look like, with the Kurds and the Sunnis and the Shiites? That is a huge question.

### Impacts In the Middle East

I was in Egypt in January and met with President Mubarak and his top advisors as well as average citizens. From those visits, I am convinced there are generally and genuinely positive feelings about the United States and there is no affection toward Saddam Hussein among the average Egyptian, the leadership of Egypt or any other nation in the region. I am, however, equally convinced that there is grave concern about the U.S. or nations such as Great Britain, which were once seen as colonial occupiers of the region, attacking another Arab nation. There are also serious and legitimate concerns about the destabilizing effects that could arise if heavy civilian casualties occur in Iraq or the ongoing religious tensions in the region flare as a result of an attack.

As to the prospect of establishing a western style constitutional democracy with Iraq after Saddam is gone, many I have spoken with in the region have expressed great skepticism about the success of such a venture. Iraq lacks the democratic and civic traditions and conflicting religious loyalties could make national unity tenuous at best.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there is a strong feeling throughout the region that any actions we take in relation to Iraq will be viewed by the Arab world from the perspective of our role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and in light of how the oil resources of Iraq would be dealt with. I will say more about this later.

### The Alternative For Now

I want to be clear. I do not believe we should rule out the possibility of war with Iraq, and I believe the President is right to keep the pressure on Saddam Hussein. I also believe it is important to send a clear message that although there are, as

there should be in a democratic republic, legitimate and public differences on how the situation should be approached, if the decision to attack is made, I am certain the Congress will stand united with our troops and see the mission through. If there is a chance that Saddam Hussein might be replaced from within and we can thereby avoid war, that chance is only viable if those within Iraq understand that once the battle is engaged, our nation will act with resolve, unity and overwhelming force.

Sending a message of unity in the event of an attack, however, does not mean we have yet exhausted the options and now is the time for that attack. In the interest of the security of our nation now and in the future, I believe the better choice for now is to stay the course, expand the size and scope of the inspection teams, increase aerial reconnaissance flights, with or without Iraqi approval, and continue to build and strengthen the international coalition.

As long as inspectors are in Iraq, it is extremely difficult for Hussein to manufacture or deploy weapons of mass destruction or troops. Further, each time inspectors visit a site, we gain valuable information that, should war be necessary, will reduce the numbers of potential targets and hence the risks to our troops and to civilians. Giving inspectors more time and gaining more evidence also strengthens our hand in building international support.

Those who favor attacking now, raise valid points about the impact of climate on our war plans as the summer approaches. Weather and temperature are important concerns, but those factors pose challenges for the Iraqis as well as for our troops. As long as the inspectors are on the ground and we have active surveillance, the Iraqi ability to manufacture weapons or to move weapons or troops is severely limited and we can readily contain their forces without deploying our own.

Critics may well ask what we will do if the inspectors are rejected and sent away from Iraq as they were in the past. If the inspectors are expelled from Iraq again, I believe the international support for military action would immediately become overwhelming. In spite of Secretary Powell's U.N. speech, we do not have that support at present. I also believe that in response to such an event, our nation, along with others, would be fully justified in launching a precise, immediate and devastating air attack on all Iraqi military targets, Saddam's palaces, and the resources of his ruling party. Under those circumstances, I would support such actions.

#### If We Go To War

While I believe for many reasons there is a better choice for now, it appears likely that President Bush will, within a matter of weeks, begin the war with Iraq. Should that happen, the American people should understand that the long term consequences, apart from the military engagements themselves, will depend on how we deal with several critical issues.

The single most important step that would limit the Iraq conflict's spread and reduce animosity among other Arab nations would be for real progress to be made in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I do not pretend that there is an easy solution to this, but I am convinced that the U.S. is seen by many in the region as having been absent from this effort in recent years. That absence has been a grievous mistake.

We must engage again and we must insist on real progress quickly. If that happens, and if we can keep civilian casualties in Iraq to a minimum, I believe most people in the region will not mourn the passing of Saddam Hussein and may in fact welcome the U.S. actions over time. On the other hand, if there is no constructive movement between Israel and the Palestinians, and if there are heavy civilian casualties in Iraq, the combination will be terribly dangerous for our troops in the region and for American civilians abroad and at home. It is that scenario, more than the war with Iraq alone that threatens to expand the global terrorist threat.

Second, and this is a point that was stressed to me by President Mubarak, we must use tremendous care not to let the attack on Hussein be interpreted as an attack against Islam. Highly publicized anti-Islamic comments from certain U.S. religious leaders have done immeasurable harm to our image in the region, have played right into the hands of the Islamic extremists, and, I believe, have increased the risk to our security as a result. So too, it cannot but harm our efforts when the Vice President speaks at events, as he did recently at the Conservative Political Action Conference, where participants are sporting stickers saying "No Muslims" and "No Terrorism" and spelling Islam with a swastika in place of the s in Islam. I do not blame Vice President Cheney for this personally, but we must understand the impact this has on the Islamic world as we contemplate the effects of an attack by our nation on an Islamic nation.

Third, as I mentioned earlier, we must ensure that an attack on Iraq cannot be interpreted as a war of conquest to meet

our energy desires. This means we must assure that any Iraqi oil is used for the direct benefit of the Iraqi people. We must also put in place domestic energy principles and policies that reduce our dependence on fossil fuels in general and foreign oil specifically. New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman has emphasized this point repeatedly. We should be honest and recognize that we can do this without great sacrifice, while helping our own economy in the meantime.

Fourth, although I am quite certain the administration and the American citizens who support war sincerely believe we would be acting in the name of freedom and liberating the Iraqis from the tyranny of Hussein, we need to understand that a good measure of the resistance we are encountering from other nations is not about our actions in Iraq per se. Rather, it reflects resentments towards a host of other positions the U.S. has taken recently in relation to the global community.

Regardless of what we do in Iraq, our national image and that of the President could benefit substantially from a purposeful effort to re-engage with the rest of the world and consciously present ourselves with more humility, with a greater spirit of collaboration, and with less apparent condescension and arrogance. President Bush's recent announcements about an expanded AIDS initiative, which has been recommended for years by many in Congress, are a step in the right direction, but there are countless other ways in which we can and should work to enhance our image abroad.

Finally, it is time for honesty and full disclosure to the American people about what this war and its aftermath will cost and how we will pay for that. We must hope that the costs in human lives lost on all sides will be minimal, but there will without doubt be casualties. If the battle becomes urbanized or if chemical or biological weapons are used, casualty numbers could be very high. When televised images of the dead are broadcast worldwide, the impacts will be profound on our own people and on the world.

Beyond the loss of lives, the economic costs in the short run will be large and could be extraordinary over the long term. In spite of this, the administration has not factored the costs of occupation into its budget figures which, already, show the largest deficits in U.S. history. There has also been no public budget discussion that I am aware of by the administration regarding how we will pay to replenish or expand troop and equipment strength elsewhere in the world, for example in the Korean peninsula, if much of our force is deployed in Iraq for an extended period of time.

The administration has also provided no public estimates of the costs to our economy of having so many of our reserve and National Guard forces taken away from their regular civilian jobs. Finally, I have seen no estimates of the costs of caring for our veterans after they return. Congress recently expanded the definition of Gulf War Syndrome to include virtually any ill health symptoms for anyone who served anywhere in the gulf region from the last war. Adding hundreds of thousands more vets to that roster will be hugely expensive to an already stretched Veterans Administration budget.

Without including the costs of a war and occupation, if we do not borrow from the Social Security and Medicare trust funds, as Congress and the President promised we would not do, the deficit will be at least -\$482 billion for 2004. By comparison, the total projected non-defense discretionary spending for that year is only \$429 billion. In other words, if we completely eliminated all non-defense spending, we would still be in deficit. This will have to be paid for some time and in some way, most likely by our children.

I know that many believe we should not consider how we pay for things when it comes to national security. If our immediate security is under threat, we must spare no expense to protect the safety of our citizens. At the same time, however, before we believe we have no options and launch an irreversible war with unpredictable risks and costs to human lives and our economy, we must be honest and not kid ourselves into believing we can do so without sacrifice and without paying for that decision for years and possibly generations to come.

We are well down a perilous course already, and if that is the course we are destined to travel, we must do so together as a nation. But the direction and final destination of this journey are not yet determined and there may be better choices yet before us.

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